REASONS RELIED ON FOR ALLOWANCE OF APPEAL

This case presents, in simplest form, the most basic and compelling reason for this Honorable Court to allow appeal: Petitioner was denied due process of law, as guaranteed by the United States Constitution. Should this Court not allow review, that wrongful deprivation will not be corrected.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Allen C. Welch, Esquire Counsel of Record 1101 North Front Street Harrisburg, PA 17102 (717)-350-1002

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IN THE SUPREME COURT OF PENNSYLVANIA MIDDLE DISTRICT

DENNIS L. RODRIGUEZ,

: No. 1100 MAL 2004

Petitioner

Petition for Allowance of Appeal

From the Order of the Commonwealth Court

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA, DEPT. OF TRANSPORTATION, BUREAU OF DRIVER LICENSING

Respondent

ORDER PER CURIUM

AND NOW, this 14th day of September, 2005, the Petition for Allowance of Appeal is hereby denied.

TRUE & CORRECT COPY ATTEST: September 14,2004

/s/ Elizabeth Zisk Elizabeth Zisk, Appellate Court Clerk

IN THE COMMONWEALTH COURT OF PENNSYLVANIA

DENNIS L. RODRIGUEZ,

Petitioner

No. 325 C.D. 2004

SUBMITTED: July 16, 2004

v.

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA, DEPT. OF TRANSPORTATION, BUREAU OF DRIVER LICENSING

BEFORE:

HONORABLE BERNARD L. McGINLEY, Judge
HONORABLE BONNIE BRIGANCE LEADBETTER, Judge
HONORABLE JAMES R. KELLEY, Senior Judge

OPINION NOT REPORTED

MEMORANDUM OPINION BY

JUDGE LEADBETTER FILED: November 8, 2004

Dennis L. Rodriguez appeals from an order of the Court of Common Pleas of Dauphin County (common pleas) that dismissed his statutory appeal from the five-year revocation of his operating privilege and also dismissed his request for time credit due to lack of jurisdiction.

The facts of this case are simply stated. Rodriguez was arrested for Driving Under the Influence (DUI)¹ on February 8,

¹ Although formerly codified at Section 3731 of the Vehicle Code (Code), 75 Pa. C.S. 3731, the section of the statute prohibiting driving under the

1997, July 4, 1997, and July 6, 2001. He pled guilty to the 1997 offense on November 18, 1997. He apparently also pled guilty to the last offense on April 8, 2002, but common pleas granted his motion to withdraw his plea, and he again pled guilty to this offense on January 13, 2003. Due to his convictions, the Department of Transportation, Bureau of Driver Licensing (Department) mailed Rodriguez, on May 3, 2002, an official notice of revocation pursuant to Section 1542(d) of the Code, 75 Pa. C.S. 1542(d). This notice informed Rodriguez of his designation as a habitual offender and that his driving privilege was being revoked for a five-year period beginning December 5, 2001. It also provided that he was required by law to have all vehicles owned by him equipped with an ignition interlock system prior to restoration of his driving privilege.³

Thereafter, Rodriguez appealed to common pleas, which held a hearing de novo. Common pleas then dismissed Rodriguez's appeal on January 16, 2004, and Rodriguez filed a timely Notice of Appeal with this court. In his brief here, he argues that: (1) the Department did not prove that he was a habitual offender in accordance with 75 Pa. C.S. 1542; (2) the Department did not give him proper credit toward his license suspension; and (3) the Department improperly required him to obtain an ignition interlock device.⁴

influence of alcohol or a controlled substance can now be found at Section 3802 of the Code, 75 Pa. C.S. 3802.

² This section (relating to period of revocation) provides: "The operating privilege of any person found to be a habitual offender under the provisions of this section shall be revoked by the department for a period of five years."

³ The Act that is commonly referred to as the Ignition Interlock Device Act was formerly codified at 42 Pa. C.S. 7001-7003. It was repealed effective Februay 1, 2004, by Act No. 2003-24. Prior to this repeal, our Supreme Court had severed certain portions of the Act that it deemed to be unconstitutional, including 42 Pa. C.S. 7002(b). See Commonwealth v. Mockaitis, 575 Pa. 5, 834 A.2d 488 (2003). The current version of the law can be found at 75 Pa. C.S. 3805.

⁴ "When only questions of law are presented, our review of the habitual offender provisions of the Code is plenary." Fetty v. Dep't of Transp., Bureau of Driver Licensing, 784 A.2d 236, 239 n.8 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2001)

With respect to the initial question of whether the Department proved Rodriguez to be a habitual offender, Section 1542(a) of the Code, 75 Pa. C.S. 1542(a) provides:

The department shall revoke the operating privilege of any person found to be a habitual offender pursuant to the provisions of this section. A "habitual offender" shall be any person whose driving record, as maintained by the department, shows that such person has accumulated the requisite number of convictions for the separate and distinct offenses described and enumerated in subsection (b) committed after the effective date of this title and within any period of five years thereafter.

Section 1542(b) of the Code, 75 Pa. C.S. 1542(b), provides that for habitual offender status the requisite number of DUI convictions is three.

Although Rodriguez argues that the Department did not prove he was a habitual offender because it wrongly submitted evidence that he was last convicted of DUI in April 2002 rather than January 2003, we find this contention meritless.⁵ The salient question is not whether Rodriguez's three DUI convictions occurred within five years of each other, but instead, "[f]or purposes of determining the five-year period under Section 1542 of the Vehicle Code, we look to the date that the licensee actually committed the violations, not the date of the convictions." Ford v. Dep't of Transp., Bureau of Driver Licensing, 776 A.2d 367, 368 n.3 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2001). Se also ." Fetty v. Dep't of Transp., Bureau of Driver Licensing, 784 A.2d 236, 240 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2001) (stating that "the Department bears the burden of demonstrating that licensee's certified driving record contains the requisite number of convictions for offenses committed within a five-year period to satisfy the habitual offender provisions of the Code.) (Emphasis added). Here the Department met its burden by introducing certified copies of Rodriguez's convictions for DUI offenses

⁵ Moreover, this court noted in Richards v. Dep't of Transp, Bureau of Driver Licensing, 767 A.2d 1133 (Pa. Cmwlth.2001), that the Department's entry into evidence of a certified record containing an incorrect date of conviction is a minor error that will not in and of itself justify overturning a license suspension.

committed on February 8, 1997, July 4, 1997, and July 6, 2001, all within a five-year span of time. Therefore, we reject Rodriguez's assertion that the Department failed to prove that he was a habitual DUI offender under section 1542 of the Code.

Rodriguez next argues that common pleas should have given him time credit toward his license revocation because he has not driven for a period of 21 months and 23 days in accordance with a December 4, 2001, court order stating that he was not to drive until his case was settled. However, in Xenakis v. Dep't of Transp., Bureau of Driver Licensing, 702 A.2d 572, 575 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1997) we stated that "[t]he trial court may not credit a licensee's suspension for time

served because DOT is better able to determine issues of credit, and its determinations are ultimately appealable to this Court." See also Dep't of Transp., Bureau of Traffic Safety v. Yarbinitz, 508 A.2d 641, 642 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1986) (stating that "for purposes of a license suspension appeal, a trial court lacks the authority to compute and give credit for any time that DOT may have been in possession of an operator's license.") Therefore, we reject Rodriguez's argument that common pleas erred in failing to award him administrative credit.

Last, Rodriguez contends that the Department wrongly required him to obtain an ignition interlock system prior to restoration of his driver's license. We agree. The law is now settled that pursuant to the original version of the Act, the Department may not require repeat DUI offenders to obtain interlock devices; rather, its "power is limited to issuing restricted licenses." Delaney v. Dep't of Transp., Bureau of Driver Licensing, 849 A.2d 300, 302 n.2 (Pa. Cmnwth. 2004). See also See Commonwealth v. Mockaitis, 575 Pa. 5, 834 A.2d 488 (2003); Cinquina v. Dep't of Transp., Bureau of Driver Licensing, 840 A.2d 525 (Pa. Cmnwth. 2004). Moreover, although the General Assembly in its recent amendment to the Act gave the Department independent authority to to require a repeat offender to install an approved ignition interlock device, that amendment "by its terms only applies when a second or subsequent DUI violation occurs after September 30, 2003[.]" Cinquina, 840 A.2d at 527 n.6. Thus, that amendment has no applicability here. We therefore agree with Rodriguez that the Department acted outside its authority in requiring him to install an interlock system in any vehicle owned by him prior to restoration of his operating privilege.

⁶ Specifically, Act No. 2003-24 amended 42 Pa. C.S. 7002(b) prior to its being struck as unconstitutional by our Supreme Court in *Mockaitis*. That amendment, which was not considered by the *Mackaitis* Court, states:

If a second or subsequent violation of 75 Pa. C.S. 3731 occurs after September 30, 2003, a court's failure to enter an order in compliance with this subsection shall not prevent the department from requiring, and the department shall require, the person to install an approved ignition interlock device in accordance with this chapter.

Accordingly, we reverse common pleas only to the extent that it upheld the Department's requirement that Rodriguez install an ignition interlock device on any vehicles owned by him as a predicate to restoration of his operating privilege. We affirm common pleas' order in all other respects.

BONNIE BRIGANCE LEADBETTER,
JUDGE

IN THE COMMONWEALTH COURT OF PENNSYLVANIA

DENNIS L. RODRIGUEZ,

Petitioner

No. 325 C.D. 2004

V.

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA, DEPT. OF TRANSPORTATION, BUREAU OF DRIVER LICENSING

ORDER

AND NOW, this 8th day of November, 2004, the order of the Court of Common Pleas of Dauphin County in the above-captioned matter is hereby AFFIRMED IN PART an REVERSED IN PART. The order is REVERSED to the extent that it upheld the Department's requirement that Rodriguez install an ignition interlock device on any vehicles owned by him as a predicate to restoration of his operating privilege, but WITHOUT PREJUDICE to the Department's obligation to restore only an interlock restricted license. We AFFIRM common pleas' order in all other respects.

BONNIE BRIGANCE LEADBETTER,
JUDGE

IN THE COMMONWEALTH COURT OF PENNSYLVANIA

DENNIS L. RODRIGUEZ,

Petitioner

No. 325 C.D. 2004

SUBMITTD: July 16, 2004

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA, DEPT. OF TRANSPORTATION, BUREAU OF DRIVER LICENSING

BEFORE:

V.

HONORABLE BERNARD L. McGINLEY, Judge
HONORABLE BONNIE BRIGANCE LEADBETTER, Judge
HONORABLE JAMES R. KELLEY, Senior Judge

OPINION NOT REPORTED

DISSENTING OPINION BY SENIOR JUDGE KELLEY

FILED: November 8, 2004

I respectfully dissent.

On February 8, 1997 and July 4, 1997, Rodriguez was charged with driving while under the influence of alcohol (DUI) in violation of section 3731 of the Vehicle Code, 75 Pa. C.S. 3731. On November 18, 1998, Rodriguez pleaded guilty to both of the offenses. As a result, on December 15, 1997, the Department sent Rodriguez two notices suspending his driving privilege for one year.

On July 6, 2001, Rodriguez was again charged with DUI. On April 8, 2002, Rodriguez pleaded guilty to the charge. On May 3, 2002, the Department sent Rodriguez a notice which stated that, pursuant to Section 1542 of the Vehicle Code⁷, he had been designated as a habitual offender based on the three DUI offenses that had occurred within a five-year period. The notice also stated that Rodriguez's driving privilege was revoked for a five-year period effective December 5, 2001.

On August 29, 2002, the trial court issued an order granting Rodriguez's petition to withdraw his guilty plea of April 8, 2002. On January 13, 2003, Rodriguez again pleaded guilty to the DUI charge of July 6, 2001. On July 24, 2003, the department again sent Rodriguez a notice which stated that he had been designated as a habitual offender based on the three DUI offenses that had occurred within a five-year period, and that his driving privilege was again revoked for a five-year period. On August 20, 2003, Rodriguez filed the instant appeal from the department's suspension notice of July 24, 2003.

On November 26, 2003, a hearing was conducted before the trial court on his appeal. At the hearing, and in support of the suspension, the department entered into evidence a packet of documents certified by its Secretary. See N.T. 11/26/038 at 7. The packet contained certified photostatic copies of the following

⁷ Section 1542 of the Vehicle Code provides, in pertinent part:

⁽a) General rule. The department shall revoke the operating privilege of any person found to be a habitual offender pursuant to the provisions of this section. A "habitual offender" shall be any person whose driving record, as maintained in the department, shows that such person has accumulated the requisite number of convictions for the separate and distinct offenses described and enumerated in subsection (b) committed after the effective date of this title and within any period of five years thereafter.

⁽c) Period of revocation.-The operating privilege of any person found to be a habitual offender under the provisions of this section shall be revoked by the department or a period of five years.

⁸ "N.T. 11/26/03" refers to the transcript of the hearing conducted before the trial court on November 26, 2003.

documents: (1) the Department's notice of suspension dated May 3, 2002, which indicated that Rodriguez's driving privilege had been revoked for a five-year period effective December 5, 2001; (2) the report of the Clerk of Courts of Dauphin County showing Rodriguez's DUI conviction of April 8, 2002; (3) the Department's notices of suspension dated December 15, 1997 which indicated that Rodriguez's driving privilege had been suspended for one year effective January 19, 1998; (4) the reports of the Clerk of Courts of Dauphin County showing Rodriguez's DUI convictions of November 18, 1997; (5) the report of the Clerk of Court of Dauphin County showing the accelerated rehabilitative disposition (ARD) of a charge dated October 3, 1989; (6) the Department's notices of suspension dated October 26, 1989 which indicated that Rodriguez's driving privilege had been suspended for three months effective October 3, 1989; and (7) the Department's certified driving history for Rodriguez which was dated June 10, 2002. See Commonwealth Exhibit #1

Thus, in the instant case, the Department failed to introduce into evidence a certified copy of the revocation notice of July 24, 2003, underlying the appeal, and a certified copy of the conviction of January 13, 2003 supporting the revocation of Rodriguez's driving privilege. Clearly, by failing to offer either a certified copy of the revocation notice itself or any evidence of a conviction supporting the revocation of Rodriguez's driving privilege, the Department failed to sustain its burden of proof in this case. See, e.g., Fetty v. Dep't of Transp., Bureau of Driver Licensing, 784 A.2d 236, 240 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2001) ("[A]s an initial matter, we. Note that the Department bers the burden of demonstrating that Licensee's certified driving record contains the requisite number of convictions for offenses committed within a five-year period to satisfy the habitual offender provisions of the [Vehicle] Code. See generally Martino v. Commonwealth, [541 A.2d 425 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1988)].").9

⁹ In Footnote 5 of its opinion, the Majority acknowledges that the Department offered a certified driving record containing the incorrect date of conviction, but that this was a minor error which would not justify the overturning of the instant license revocation. However, in doing so, the majority fails to apprehend that the Department failed to offer the correct notice of revocation underlying the appeal itself, and any evidence of the conviction supporting that revocation. The certified copy of the notice of revocation of May 3,

More importantly, even if it is assumed that the Department met its burden of proof in this regard, both the certified copy of the notice of the notice of revocation and the copy of Rodriguez's driving record that were admitted into evidence clearly and explicitly state that the five-year revocation was to be effective December 5, 2001. December 5, 2001. See Commonwealth Exhibit #1. Thus, in his appeal, Rodriguez was not asking the trial court to recalculate the revocation period imposed by the Department. Rather, in his

2002, and certified copy of the conviction of April 8, 2002, that were offered by the Department at the hearing were, at that point, null and void as Rodriguez had withdrawn his guilty plea, entered a new guilty plea on January 13, 2003, and the Department had issued a new revocation notice of July 24, 2003 which was the subject of the appeal. To my mind, such an omission on the Department's part implicates the fundamental guarantee of due process and can never be deemed to be a "minor error." See, e.g., Dunn v. Department of Transportation, 819 A.2d 189, 192-193 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2003) ("[I]t is true that immaterial or technical defects in a notice of license suspension will not be grounds for reversing a suspension. Department of Driver Licensing v. Sutton, 541 Pa. 35, 660 A.2d 46 (1995) (one-day discrepancy as to date of refusal to take blood test is curable, technical defect); Hatzai v. Department of Transportation, Bureau of Driver Licensing, 686 A.2d 48 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1996) (incorrect citation to vehicle code, instead of controlled substances act, was immaterial error when notice stated correct date of conviction for single offense). In contrast, this case presents a rare and egregious combination of incorrect dates of both violations and convictions and a seven-year delay in issuing notices of suspension, not all of which, however, may be chargeable to the Department. Moreover, this case is not one in which the relevant notices contained minor, technical errors. See Harrington v. Department of Transportation, Bureau of Driver Licensing, 563 Pa. 565, 763 A.2d 386 (2000) (failure of New Jersey report and Pennsylvania suspension notice to note driver's plea or whether conviction resulted from forfeiture of security did not violate due process when notice correctly reference the conviction and its date and notified driver of equivalent DUI provision and statutory authority for suspending his license)."). le It should be noted that, at the hearing before the trial court, counsel for the Department stated that Rodriguez's driving privilege had been restored on June 13, 2002 after it had been revoked effective December 5, 2001. See N.T. 11/26/03 at 10-12. However, the certified documents offered by the Department, and entered into evidence, contain no such information. See Commonwealth Exhibit #1. Rather, a certified notice of revocation, and the certified driving record, merely indicate the Rodriguez's driving privilege had been revoked by the Department for a five-year period and that the revocation was effective December 5, 2001. Id.

appeal, Rodriguez was merely asking the trial court to compel the Department to comply with the revocation period that it imposed as reflected in its records. The trial court clearly possessed jurisdiction in such a case, and the court erred in concluding otherwise. 11

¹¹ See, e.g., Waite v. Department of Transportation, 834 Pa. 1218, 1221 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2003) ([I]n this instance, the common pleas court originally determined that an error had been made in determining the date Waite surrendered his license to the court and when each suspension period should begin. The common pleas court ordered that error be corrected. DOT ignored that finding and made its own determination as to when the suspension should run. Moreover, DOT did not appeal the common pleas court's determination. If DOT wanted to challenge the period of suspension, it should have appealed the original order instead of collaterally attacking the common pleas court's decision to enforce its original order . . . [H]ere, the common pleas court correctly noted it enjoyed subject matter jurisdiction because Waite challenged whether DOT acted in accordance with law when it failed to treat each suspension period as beginning the day that he surrendered his license to the common pleas court. The common pleas court accurately perceived that Waite did not request a recalculation of his suspensions."); Ladd v. Department of Transportation, 753 A.2d 318, 321-322 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2000) ("[T]he trial court misperceived Licensee's argument. Licensee was not requesting that the trial court recalculate his driving record. Instead, Licensee was seeking an adjudication that DOT failed to act according to the law after DOT removed Licensee from habitual offender status. According to Licensee, once DOT removed Licensee from habitual offender status, DOT could properly impose only three one-year suspensions as a result of his section 1543 convictions; thus, Licensee asserted tat DOT sentenced him in violation of the law when it imposed three two-year revocations. That issue was properly held before the trial court. And the trial court erred in holding otherwise.").

Accordingly, unlike the majority, I would reverse the trial court's order in all respects.

/s/ JAMES R. KELLEY

Senior Judge

DENNIS L. RODRIGUEZ, IN THE COURT OF COMMON

: PLEAS OF DAUPHIN COUNTY

Petitioner

: PENNSYLVANIA

:NO. 2003 CV 3627 LS

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA, DEPT. OF TRANSPORTATION. BUREAU OF DRIVER LICENSING

Respondent

MEMORANDUM PURSUANT TO Pa.R.A.P. 1925(b)

The Petitioner has appealed this court's order of January 16, 2004, dismissing his license suspension appeal. The issue on the license suspension appeal was whether the Petitioner was correctly adjudicated as a habitual offender under 75 Pa.C.S.A. 1542. Following the hearing before this court on November 26, 2003, we granted the Petitioner 30 days to file a brief in support of his argument that he is not a habitual offender within section 1542 and the Department of Transportation ("Department") had 10 days to file a response.

The petitioner argued at the hearing and in his brief that he is not a habitual offender since he was not convicted of the offense of DUI three times within a five year span as required by section 1542. The Department alleged that the three relevant DUI offenses occurred on February 8, 1997; July 4, 1997; and July 6, 2001. 1

The petitioner has been arrested for DUI four times: March 3, 1989; February 8, 1997, July 4, 1997; and July

^{6, 2001.} The first errest in March of 1989 is not an issue in this case as it did not occur within five years of any other arrest or conviction.

The petitioner admits that he pled guilty to the first two occurrences on November 18, 1997.

The issue here is whether, for purposes of designating a defendant as a habitual offender under section 1542 of the Vehicle Code, the Department should consider the dates of the DUI offense or, on the other hand, the dates of the DUI convictions. In this case, the dates of commission of DUI all fall within a five-year period, but the dates of conviction do not. The petitioner pled guilty and was therefore convicted of the first two relevant charges on November 18, 1997. The petitioner first pled guilty to the third charge on April 8, 2002, but then moved to withdraw his guilty plea, and the honorable Scott Evans granted that motion on October 15, 2002. After subsequent proceedings, the petitioner again pled guilty to the third charge on January 1, 2003, more than five years after his first to convictions on November 18, 1997. According to Section 1542 f the Vehicle Code,

A "habitual offender" shall be any person whose driving record, as maintained in the Department, shows that such person has accumulated a requisite number of convictions for the separate and distinct offense described and enumerated in subsection (b) committed after the effective date of this title and within any period of five years thereafter.

(emphasis added). It appears that the legislature intended the designation of a habitual offender is to be based upon convictions of offenses committed within a five-year period.

The Department argues that the actual conviction dates are separated by more than five years simply due to the litigation undertaken by Petitioner in connection with the third offense. If the court follows the Petitioner's logic, an individual could manipulate the appeals, court filing and litigation dates in order to delay actual conviction dates and avoid designation as a habitual offender. We agree with the Department that such an outcome is adverse to the spirit of the law and the legislative intent behind section 1542. In considering this very issue, the Commonwealth Court stated,

[T]his court has previously stated that, for purposes of determining the five-year period under section 1542 of the Code, 75 Pa.C.S. 1542, we must look at the dates that the licensee actually committed the violations, not the dates of convictions.

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, Bureau of Driver Licensing v. Richardson, 167 Pa.Cmwlth.630, 648 A.2d 1308 (1994) citing, Sanders v. Department of Transportation, Bureau of Traffic Safety, 89 Pa.Cmwlth 609, 493 A.2d 794 (1985).

The Petitioner argues that the <u>Richardson</u> case is distinguishable from the instant case since that case involved four counts of driving without insurance, rather than DUI. We find this to be a distinction without difference. The <u>Richardson</u> court's language is clear, and it seems arbitrary to limit its applicability only to the offense of driving without insurance. We therefore dismiss the Petitioner's appeal.

BY THE COURT:

/s/ Bruce F. Bratton

Judge